

A sermon, delivered in the Presbyterian meeting-house in Winchester, on Thursday the 23d Jan. 1812; being a day of fasting and humiliation, appointed by the citizens of Winchester on account of the late calamitous fire at the Richmond theatre.

A SERMON, DELIVERED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN MEETING-HOUSE IN WINCHESTER, ON THURSDAY THE 23D JAN. 1812; BEING A DAY OF FASTING AND HUMILIATION, APPOINTED BY THE CITIZENS OF WINCHESTER ON ACCOUNT OF THE LATE CALAMITOUS FIRE AT THE RICHMOND THEATRE.

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By the Rev. WILLIAM HILL. OF WINCHESTER.

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Dear Sir,

ON behalf of the Committee, appointed by the late meeting of the Citizens of Winchester, and at the request of many of our mutual friends, I have to request that you will favour us with a copy of your truly excellent and appropriate Sermon, delivered on Thursday last, for publication.

I am, respectfully, ALFRED H. POWELL.

Monday, Jan. 27 th, 1812.

To the Rev. WILLIAM HILL.

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SERMON, &c.

Luke — XIII.—1 *st* and 5 *th* inclusive.

There were present at this season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices — And Jesus answering said unto them; suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay: but except ye repent ye shall also likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell you nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

THE Blessed Saviour in the close of the last chapter, had just mentioned what would be dreadful doom of obstinate and impenitent sinners, who, when in the hands of their adversary, and about to be hauled before their Judge, should still neglect to make their peace with him.—This induced some person present to mention the case of those Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, as a case supposed to be in point. The Saviour, as was his custom, took an occasion, from the relation of that barbarous act, to deduce a pious improvement, and to impart useful instruction.

By referring to another passage of scripture, and to the Jewish historian, Josephus, we learn the occasion of this cruel deed. These persons, slain by Pilate, the procurator of Judea, were some of the faction of Judas of Galilee, mentioned by Gamaliel in the 5th Chap. of the Acts of the Apostles, and more at large, by Josephus. This Judas had stirred up the Galileans to sedition against the Roman government, under a pretence of asserting their liberty, by freeing them from the Roman tribute: and some of them coming

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to Jerusalem, to sacrifice 4 according to the custom of the Jews, at the Passover; Pilate caused them to be slain upon the spot, while they were engaged in offering up their sacrifices; shedding their blood, with that of their beasts, which they were slaying for the altar.

Our Saviour takes occasion from the relation of this event, to correct a very vicious humour, which has always raged in the world: that of censuring the faults of others, whilst we overlook our own.

The principle of self-love which was inherent in man, has, by our apostacy degenerated into self-flattery, so that it has now almost become natural to man, to supply the want of a good conscience, by a good opinion of themselves. And hence it comes to pass, that men are so ready to take all advantages to confirm themselves in that false peace, which they have created to themselves in their own imagination: and so they can but maintain a comfortable opinion of themselves, it matters not how uncharitable they are to others: and knowing no better way to foster this fond conceit of themselves than by fancying God to be their friend, it hence comes to pass, that they are so apt to interpret the providences of God towards others in favour of themselves, and to abuse the judgments which fall upon their neighbours, into an argument of their own comparative innocence.

Therefore, our Saviour, who knew what was in man, and what kind of conclusions men are apt to draw from such occurrences of Providence as are before us, endeavours in the first place to prevent the bad use which they were apt to make of them. "Suppose ye," says he, "that those Galileans were sinners, above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay."

To this instance of the Galileans, he adds another still stronger. Pilate might be represented as a tyrant, and the best of men are liable to suffer, by the cruel hand of oppression. But he now mentions an occurrence of a recent date, and well known to all at Jerusalem, which proceeded immediately from the hand of God, without the agency of

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man. "Those eighteen upon whom the 5 tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that *they* were sinners above all that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell you nay."

And having thus anticipated the censuring of others, our Saviour proceeds to awaken his hearers to a consideration and care of themselves. "I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The general sense of which words, is, that impenitency in sin, will certainly be the ruin of men sooner or later. It will bring great mischiefs upon them in this World: but however that may be, it will infallibly plunge them into inconceivable misery in the next. But besides the certain denunciation of misery and ruin to all impenitent sinners, which is the largest sense of the words, and analogous to many other declarations of scripture, it is probable that our Saviour, in the present instance, more immediately referred to those temporal calamities which were shortly to befall the Jews; and by way of prediction, foretold what would be the fate of that whole nation, if they continued impenitent. There is a peculiar force in the word, *omoios*, which means something more than merely, *likewise*, or also, as it is rendered in our translation. It means literally, "except ye repent, ye shall all perish *in like manner*," i. e. besides the vengeance of another world, a temporal judgment as sad as those just alluded to, and not much unlike them. shall come upon this whole nation: which awful prediction was soon after fulfilled at the siege and sack of Jerusalem, by the Roman army under Titus.

The pious and useful reflections, suggested by the subject under consideration, would also very naturally arise from the late awful visitation of Richmond, which has shrouded that city in gloom—thrown our legislatures into mourning, and suspended the voice of melody and song. The dreadful scene forbids all attempts at painting it, for it would actually beggar all description.*

* What follows, was here introduced when the sermon was delivered: but upon reflection, I think it had better appear in the shape of a note than in the body of the sermon.

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All that I shall venture upon, towards this, at present, will be to use a few appropriate lines from a favourite Poet.

When against reason, riot shuts the door, And Gaiety supplies the place of sense, Death leads the dance, and stamps the deadly dye? Gayly carousing, to his gay compeers, Inly, he laughs, to see them laugh at him As absent far. And when the revel burns; When fear is banished, and triumphant thought Calling for all the joys beneath the moon, Against death turns the key; and bids him sup With their progenitors—He drops his mask, Frown out at full,—they start—despair—and die.

Scarce with more sudden terror and surprize, From his black mask of nitre, touch'd by fire, He bursts—explodes—roars—blazes—and devours?

A shining mark invites the tyrants spear, As if to damp our elevated aims, And strongly preach humility to man. Oh! how portentous is festivity! How comet-like, it threatens while it shines! We have just had full proofs of death's ambition? To cull his victims from the fairest folds, And sheathe his shafts in all the pride of life, When flooded with abundance: purpled o'er With recent honours, bloom'd with every bliss; Set up in ostentation; made the gaze, The gaudy centre of the public eye; When fortune thus had tossed her children up, How sudden have we seen them drop at once; Our morning's envy, and our evening's sigh:

Thus runs death's dread commission," Strike! but so, "As most alarms the living by the dead." Hence stratagem delights him, and surprize, And cruel sport with man's securities. Not simple conquest, *triumph* is his aim And where least fear'd, *there* conquest triumphs most. [Somewhat altered and accommodated from Young.]

6 It is true our friends and fellow citizens have been arrested—suddenly arrested—in an hour of thoughtless gaiety and mirth.—Many—Ah! many have fallen victims to devouring flames: without previous reflection hurried to a judgment bar, and to a destiny henceforward unalterable. And are we to conclude, that *they* were the guilty, and we the

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innocent? Our Saviour cautions us from drawing such a conclusion, but assures us “that except we repent, we shall all likewise perish!”

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From the text and the occasion thus explained, let us consider two things.

1st. The wrong use and censorious conclusions which men are apt to draw from signal judgments of God upon others.

2nd. The right use which we should make of these things; which is, to reflect upon our own sins, and repent of them; lest the like, or greater judgments overtake us.

But, before I enter upon a discussion of this subject, I beg leave to make one or two remarks.—Remarks which I think necessary from the place in which I stand; from a regard to the office I sustain,—And to guard against a misapprehension or misconstruction, of what I may say upon this occasion.

Whilst I sincerely commiserate the unhappy victims who have lately fallen at the theatre in Richmond; whilst I condole with their afflicted friends and relatives; Whilst I mean to censure,—and censure with severity the illiberal and malignant constructions, which many are disposed to draw from this and similar occurrences; I am constrained to declare myself an enemy to the amusements of the theatre, as they are in use in our day. Not that I suppose a theatre might not be so ordered and regulated, as to become a powerful auxiliary to virtue, patriotism, and literature. I believe they formerly answered these purposes in ancient Greece and Rome: and I have no doubt that they might again, under proper management and regulations: but I view them, at present, as little better than schools of vice. The stage has fallen into the hands of the most abandoned and licentious wretches and prostitutes, with few exceptions. The performances are very generally calculated to offend piety, and wound modesty and delicacy: to bestow our support and

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charity upon such objects, is certainly to divert it from objects much more worthy and meritorious.

But, notwithstanding my opposition to the theatre, I do not suppose it so deadly a crime to attend it, as to call for a signal judgment of God to distinguish it from other vices. I have no hesitation in declaring, that I consider it as comparatively innocent, to many other practices very common with others, as well as among ourselves; and committed by persons not unwilling to deal out the thunders of Jehovah against their neighbours, and to constitute themselves the interpreters of Providence.

We are now, 1st, to consider the wrong use and censorious conclusions, men are apt to draw from the signal judgments of God upon others.

In general, it consists in being very uncharitable and censorious towards them. This may sometimes be the effect of sheer envy, and malevolence; (for the credit of human nature it is to be hoped that this case does not often happen)—but it is more commonly the consequence of a gross and stupid neglect of ourselves. For men do not usually cherish and entertain this censorious humour for its own sake; but in order to some other end; and that is, most commonly, self-flattery and a fond affection for themselves. This makes them forward to represent others, to all the disadvantage possible, that they themselves may appear less evil in their own eyes, and have a foil to set themselves off by comparison. It is the nature of guilt, to flee from itself, and to use all possible arts, to hide and lessen itself. For guilt in the soul, is like deformity in the body; persons of this description seldom arrive at the absurd conceit of thinking themselves beauties. But because they cannot think so, they do all they can to comfort and commend themselves, by comparison. Hence men are apt to multiply and aggravate the faults and miscarriages of others, that their own may appear the less: for a less evil in respect to a greater, hath some face and appearance of good. And because there can be no greater evidence that a man is a great sinner, than for him to be declared to be so, from heaven, many are forward to interpret the remarkable judgments of God upon others, as an argument of their being more notorious offenders.

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Sometimes this is done, thro' a species of pride, and 9 curiosity, in seeming to understand the reason and end of Gods judgments, as if they had been of his council and saw further into the reasons of *his* Providence than other men. Like some pragmatistical politicians, who, affecting to be in the secrets and confidence of government, will pretend to understand all its hidden springs, and undertake not only to explain the design and intention of every public measure, but also foretel what is yet to come to pass. But what is still worse—this is many times done to gratify their own passions and foolish conceits; as if God was angry with those persons and things which displease *them*: and that God's judgments are expressions of his displeasure at those persons whom they dislike, and would certainly punish, if the government of the world were in their hands.

But many mistaken men think it a piece of piety and affectionate zeal for God, and a taking of his part, to censure those heavily, whom he afflicts severely. Like some cringing Parasites, who if they should see a great man, whom they would call their friend, to be angry with any one and to strike him, would think themselves bound, thro' mere officiousness, to fall upon him and beat him too. But from whatever cause it may proceed, it certainly is a base principle; and our Saviour, in the text, does, with great vehemency deny, that any such conclusions can, with certainty, be collected from the judgments of God upon others; “I tell you nay;” and to express it still more vehemently, he repeats it again, “I tell you nay.” This however is a very common practice among men, and with good men too in other respects, as we may learn from the friends of Job, who, when they saw him afflicted by the hand of God in so strange and extraordinary a manner, presently concluded that he must needs be a very great offender, and because they could find no evidence of this in his life and actions, they therefore concluded that his wickedness was secret, and he, consequently, a great hypocrite.

This also was the mistake of the Disciples of Christ, who having found a man that was born blind, asked B 10 him; “who did sin—this man or his parents that he was born blind?” All this proceeded from laying down this mistaken principle, “That God always deals with

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men in this world according to their actions, and that one might judge of a man's state, from the rewards or punishments that follow him, in this life."

If this were to be the rule of God's procedure with us, alas! who could hope to escape. This is not the state of rewards and punishments, but as the wise man saith "The like happeneth to all; as it is with the wicked, so is it also with the righteous." Thank God! we live under a gracious and corrective dispensation as yet.

Not, but that the hand of God doth, sometimes, as it were by a finger, point at a sin, which it designs to punish; as when *remarkable* punishments follow *visibly* upon *notorious* sins;—when some great and *clamorous* impiety calls down some *immediate* and *sudden* judgment from heaven, as in the case of Annanias and Sapphira. Or, when a sin is punished in its own kind, as drunkenness by a surfeit—lewdness by disease,—intemperance by sickness,—sloth by poverty &c. with a judgment so plainly suited to it and so palpable, that the punishment carries the very mark and signature of the sin upon it. In such cases we may with safety ascribe the punishment to a particular sin, and say, it is a manifestation of God's displeasure at such practices. But unless the case be remarkably clear and obvious, it is more becoming creatures possessed of such limited power as we have, to be cautious and modest. Except then the case be very manifest, or we possessed a revelation to guide us, it would be rash to be peremptory as to the particular sin or kind of sin, so as to say, "that for such a sin God sent such a judgment upon a particular person, or company of persons. It would likewise be rash for any man without a divine revelation, peremptorily to conclude, that God, in his judgments, has respect only to some recent acts of impiety, and that his arrows are leveled against the wickedness of those men *only*, who are now upon the stage and in present view. In forming 11 such a conclusion, we should take the measure of our Maker by ourselves. And because men are mightily affected with the present, and very sensible of a fresh provocation, and wish to revenge themselves while the heat is upon them, therefore many would also have their Maker do so. But there is nothing which occasions more mistakes about God and

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his providence, than to bring him to our standard, and to measure his thoughts by our thoughts, and the ways and methods of his providence by ours.

Justice in God, is a wise, calm, and steady principle which, as to the time and circumstances of its exercise, is regulated by his wisdom. Past and present, are very material differences as to us; but they signify little with God, whose vast and incomprehensible understanding takes in all differences of time, and looks upon them as at one view. So that when the judgments of God follow the sins of men at a great distance, God is not slack concerning his word, as men count slackness; for a thousand years are in his sight as but one day, and one day as a thousand years.

We have abundant testimony from scripture, that the justice of God often has a great retrospection, and punishes the sins of men a long time after the commission of them. In the second commandment, he threatens to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation; and the Canaanites were, for many generations, filling up the measure of their iniquity. If this were not the case, how then should God judge the world? If it be consistent with the justice of God to respite the greatest part of the punishment of sinners to another world, he certainly may, without any imputation of his justice, defer the punishment of sin in this world.

It would likewise be rash to conclude, from some circumstances in the judgments or some fanciful parrallel betwixt the sin and the punishment, what sinners or what persons in particular, God designed to punish by such a calamity. There is scarcely any thing that betrays 12 men more to hasty and ungrounded censures and determinations concerning the judgments of God, than a superstitious observation of some little circumstances belonging to them; and the conceit of a seeming parallel between such a sin, and such a punishment This was the ground of Shemei's rash determination concerning David, and what particular sin of his it was, for which God permitted his son Absalom to rise up in rebellion against him. "The Lord hath returned upon thee (says he) the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath now delivered the kingdom

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into the hands of Absalom thy son and behold thou art taken in thy own mischief." Here seemed to be as handsome a parallel between this misfortune which befel David, and his conduct towards the house of Saul, as can well happen in any judgment But Shemei was mistaken notwithstanding; for the Lord had set David upon the throne of Saul himself,—meant to restore it to him again, and continue his posterity in possession of it after him. The consideration of this one instance should very much deter wise men from peremptory conclusions concerning the judgments of God, upon such slight grounds, as a supposed parallel between the sin and the punishment. Yet mankind are very generally affected in this superstitious way. All parties are very greedy to catch at any shadow of a parallel, between the judgments which befel their enemies, and the sins, which they suppose them to have committed: and are apt to cry out, "Such things are evident testimonies from heaven," of God's displeasure against those whom they would wish to make odious.

In the beginning of the reformation, when Zuinglius, the great reformer of Switzerland was slain in battle by the Papists, and his body burned, it was reported that his heart was found entire in the ashes. From this circumstance, his *enemies* undertook to infer the hardness and contumacy of his heart; and his *friends* the firmness and sincerity of it, in true religion. Every thing has two handles—and a good wit and a lively imagination¹³ may find something in every judgment, whereby he may turn it upon his adversaries. Fancy is an endless thing; and if we will go this way to work, then he that has the best wit and the most fanciful imagination, is likely to be the best interpreter of God judgments and providence.

Once more It is presumptuous and dangerous for us to determine any thing absolutely, concerning the ends and consequences of God's judgments. Commonly, all parties that are down or low in circumstances, are apt to soothe or flatter themselves, that God intends by such and such judgments upon their adversaries, to make way for the restoration of their sect or party; and the bestowment of those things which they desire.—Others who are more gloomy and melancholy, are apt to forebode the worst, and to imagine dreadful and dismal consequences. But it is absurd for us us to pretend to know the secret

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ends and designs of Providence. Sometimes God makes one calamity the forerunner of another; and sometimes again, his omnipotent wisdom forceth good out of evil and makes a great judgment in the issue, to turn out a great blessing. Jacob thought the loss of his son Joseph, the greatest calamity that could possibly befall him; when in the end it proved the greatest mercy to him and his family that could happen.

Thus I have done with the first thing I proposed, which was to consider the wrong use and censorious conclusions which men are apt to draw from signal judgments of God upon others. I proceed to the 2d thing proposed—which was—to consider the right use we should make of these things; and that is—to reflect upon our own sins and repent of them, lest the like or greater judgments overtake us. Thus, our Saviour tells us in the next words. “But except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” As if he had said—there is no reason at all why we should conclude from the terrible judgments of God, which have befallen others, that they were greater sinners than ourselves, who have for the present escaped. But instead of censuring them, we should look into ourselves. The most proper reflection to be made upon such occasions is, that we also are liable to the like judgments ourselves; that our sins have deserved that God's providence should have dealt with us as it did with those Galileans, by mingling our blood and sacrifices together—or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell—or those of our fellow citizens who fell in the late conflagration. But whatever were the reasons why judgments fell upon them and passed us by, we may be sure of this one thing: that if we continue impenitent, we have reason to expect the like or greater ruin.

When we see the judgments of God abroad in the world, and to fall heavily upon particular persons and places, we should argue thus, with ourselves. For what reason the Holy and wise providence of God hath dealt so severely with others, I know not. Whether out of a particular displeasure against them, for some notorious sin committed by them, or whether for a merciful warning to myself and others, or for both, it is not for me to pry curiously into the counsels of God, and to wade into the unfathomable depths of his judgments; but there is one use which I am sure it concerns me nearly, to make of it; to look into myself

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—to search and try my ways—to repent of my sins,—and to forsake them, lest, while I am gazing upon others, I fall into the like or greater calamities myself.

It may be, that those persons who have been so severely visited, were not more obnoxious than I am; when this hath happened to persons, from all appearances not greater sinners than myself, what may not I fear who am in the same condemnation?—It may be, they were not so great sinners as I am. This should awaken me still more to a consideration of my danger. Nay, judgments have often fallen upon some of God's own dear children,—this should startle me most of all; for if these things have been done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If this have been the lot of those whom God loves, what shall be the portion of those whom he hates? If judgment may begin at the house, where shall the ungodly and the sinners appear?

The judgments which are executed upon particular places and persons, are designed by heaven to be so many admonitions to the inhabitants of the world, to learn righteousness. The fearful ruin which befel Sodom and Gomorra and the cities about them, was not intended only for those wicked cities, but for a standing example and a lasting terror to all ages of the world. For St. Jude tells us, that Sodom and Gomorra and the cities about them are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

It is the advice of the prophet Micah, “That we should hear the rod and him who hath appointed it!” Every rod of God,—every affliction hath a voice, which not only speaks to the sufferers who are smitten, but to those who stand by and look on. And if when God sends judgments upon others we do not take the warning; if, when instead of reflecting upon ourselves, and trying our own ways, we turn our eyes from the sight, and shut our ears upon the voice: then we leave the Almighty no other way to awaken us, and bring us to the consideration of our evil ways, but by pouring down his wrath upon our own heads, that so he may convince us that we are sinners, by the same argument from which we have concluded others to be so.

We should remember that we are called, by these occurrences particularly, to the exercise of repentance. But invain should we profess our penitence, if we should continue in our former practice of sin. We must be conscious that we are all chargeable with many sins and misdeeds; if so, we are but masking the matter with our Maker, and practising the merest dissimulation to pretend to fast and humble ourselves before him, without a reformation. Without an amendment there can be no repentance, and except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. And thus I have done with the second consideration: which was, the right use which we ought to make of the judgments of God upon others. I shall now only draw an inference or two from what has been said.

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And 1st. Let us adore the awful majesty of heaven, whose judgments we have been contemplating; and bow down to his sovereignty. Instead of searching into the particular ends and reasons of Providence, let us say with St Paul "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" If he who had been taken up to the third heavens, and heard things that were unutterable; if he who had been admitted so much nearer to the secrets of God than we have, durst not pry into them, how much less should we, who dwell in houses that have their foundations in the dust? Let us not perplex ourselves with nice inquiries into those things, nor trouble one another with mutual censures and uncharitable reflections; but let us all agree in this—to acknowledge the righteousness of God in all his judgments and providences to us, and others; and to humble ourselves under his mighty hand; firmly believing, that if we are found conscientiously discharging our duty, all things shall turn to our good. Let us comply with the visible and open ends of God judgments upon ourselves and others, which is to search and try our ways, and return to the Lord that he may have mercy upon us, and to our God that he may abundantly pardon.

2d. We should sincerely deplore the loss we have sustained by the late awful visitation, and commiserate the unhappy sufferers. Our holy religion teaches us not only to "rejoice

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with those that do rejoice, but also to weep with those that weep!" Our loss has been great indeed, in the many valuable lives of which our country has been deprived.

The chief magis *t*ra *t*e of our s *t*a *t*e, with o *t*hers who have filled wi *t*h *t*he grea *t*es *t* respec *t*abili *t*y, offices of *t*he highes *t* honour and *t*rus *t* which our coun *t*ry could bes *t* ow, have been swep *t* from us! The number of respec *t*able vic *t*ims is so great, as absolu *t*ely *t*o prohibi *t* all a *t*t emp *t*s a *t* panegyrick—and *t*he scene so horrible, as *t*o forbid descrip *t*ion. To *t*he awful decrees of heaven we mus *t* submit! We can but drop a *t*ear, whilst we resign 17 the dead (*t*o us no more) into the hands of a merciful and righteous God.

What heart is there so hard, but must feel for the bereaved and suffering relatives! To them we owe the tenderest sympathies. Human nature is so constituted, that when we have those, who participate in our sufferings and divide our griefs, the poignancy of sorrow is considerably blunted, and the affliction alleviated, to the principal sufferer. Refuse not your hearts, then upon the present occasion: lock not up your feelings from the present distress.

None but those who have experienced the loss of a beloved husband or wife in the ordinary course of nature, can realize the distress of such a scene. But what a laceration must the late sudden and indiscribable separations give, to the wound!

No affection upon earth can be more pure and angelick, than that of a fond father or mother, to an amiable, accomplished & affectionate daughter, for whom they have passed sleepless nights and anxious days. How does the sight of every opening accomplishment and every mental excellency thrill thro' their hearts, with unutterable delight! No pang of nature can equal what is felt, when they are called to close their eyes in death, with all the preparation that a lingering disease can give! But—to view them in the morning, in all the sprightliness of youth and bloom of health—and in the evening—breathless corpses;—to see them one hour before, in all their beauty and interesting vivacity—and the next,

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to be informed of their being enveloped in flames and reduced to an indistinguishable ruin—O God! the heart of man can scarcely believe, but that this is all an illusion of the imagination! Thinking they must still be alive—they involuntarily look out to see them return—or inquire after them of all they meet. You will excuse me from pursuing this description thro' more of the tender and endearing relations of life, for we have had enough of this overwhelming tale of woe. C

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3d. Let us be unfeignedly thankful, that, while so many have lately been swept from this world into an awful eternity, we have been respited; and so many of our friends and relations, who were imminently in danger, have escaped unhurt. Bless the Lord, O, our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O, our souls and forget not his benefits.

Lastly. Let us beware of felicitating ourselves too highly upon our escape and thereby thinking ourselves too secure. I have no authority to apply these words to you as our Saviour did, to the Jews; because, as has been mentioned, they contained a prediction of a particular event, to that nation, in case they continued impenitent; which they did, and this prophecy was soon after sadly fulfilled, in the utter ruin and destruction of that devoted people. I know not what Providence has in reserve for us, and our country. For aught we can tell, we may have to witness distressful scenes for ourselves in a short time. Our political horizon has become awfully lowering—our earth has had its shaking fits, and has been tottering very lately under our guilty feet! In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—we may all be buried alive and our habitations made a heap of ruins. One thing is very certain—we are a guilty people; an ungrateful nation: and this we may assuredly say, from a warrant of the general tenor of scripture; that if, notwithstanding these great judgments of God which have been upon us, and made such fearful desolations among us, we do not search and try our ways and turn to him who has smitten others for our warning, we have

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reason to fear we shall suffer in a manner somewhat similar; or, that God will bring some greater temporal judgment upon us and be angry with us until he has utterly consumed us.

But whatever God may do as to temporal judgments, this we are as sure of, as the word of God can make us; that there is a sad fate hanging over all impenitent sinners; which, however they may escape in this world will certainly fall upon them in the next. God hath sworn 19 it, and shall he not do it? that such shall never enter into his rest. He is immutably determined to make such for ever miserable, as by their final obstinacy and impenitency refuse to be happy. And of this terrible doom the judgments here in the text, and that lately experienced among ourselves, are but imperfect types and representations. How glad would sinners then be, to suffer only such things as the Galileans did—what a favour would they esteem it to have no worse fate, than those eighteen upon whom a tower fell;—How willingly would they then exchange their lot, for a hasty temporary blaze of fire that would instantly suffocate them; destroy all sensibility, and reduce them to ashes! Fain would they call to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and there lie hid from the face of him, that shall sit upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. No, it is a more fearful ruin—a destruction infinitely more terrible that awaits those in another world, who will not repent in this life; even everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power! And how great and fearful that is, is not to be expressed in words; nor can we frame any perfect idea of it, from any of those pains and sufferings with which we are acquainted in this world. For who knows the power of God's anger? or who can conceive the utmost of what omnipotent justice is able to do to sinners?

Certainly, nothing can be a sadder presage of greater calamities, and a more fearful ruin yet to befall us, than that we have hitherto been so little reformed by those loud and thick volleys of judgments, which have been already thundered upon us. This was what brought at last so terrible a destruction upon the Egyptians: they were hardened under ten previous plagues. To be impenitent under the judgments of heaven which are so mercifully designed to reclaim and to reform us, is to poison ourselves with that which was

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intended for our medicine, and, by a miraculous kind of obstinacy, to turn the rods of God into serpents.

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Be assured we have not been called to repentance and reformation too soon. God knows, the state of religion, of morals, & manners is gloomy enough among us; we have enough to repent of: enough that calls aloud for reformation. May we not hope we are already sensible of it! Let us then shew our sincerity by our conduct—use all our influence from our standing in society and from the stations we may fill, to suppress vice and impiety in every shape: and to approve ourselves to our maker. Other places have been sorely visited and have sorely suffered. Sin, no doubt, has been the procuring cause of all our sufferings.

“What then, were they the wicked above all, And we the righteous?— No—none are clear, And none than we more guilty. But where all Stand chargeable with guilt, and to the shafts Of wrath obnoxious; God may choose his mark; May punish if he please, the less, to warn The more malignant. If he spar'd not them, Tremble, and be amaz'd at thine escape —lest he spare not thee.”

Cowper.

THE END.